

PEOPLE & THINGS

I RARELY go to the cinema, but my friends tell me that Mr. Clifton Webb has no equal in Hollywood when it comes to playing a mellifluous fustpot. Very different, however, is the character of his namesake, the new New Zealand High Commissioner, who is expected to reach this country shortly after Christmas.

The new High Commissioner is the most forthright of men. A lawyer by profession, he has for the past five years been New Zealand Minister for External Affairs. With his forthrightness (after what he saw at the Geneva Conference this year he defied American displeasure by coming out boldly in favour of admitting Communist China to the United Nations) there goes a streak of engaging self-confidence. I learn, for instance, that just before the recent elections in New Zealand, and at a time when his appointment to London depended on the Government's re-election, he sold all his furniture and effects by auction, announcing at the same time that he would shortly be leaving for London.

It seems a promising beginning.

An Intellectual at Sea

I HAVE always considered Georges Carpentier one of the most romantic figures of the twentieth century. With his extreme good looks and knightly bearing, his black bowler, yellow gloves and varnished bootees, his lion cubs and his silver-hooded Bellanger roadster, he is a person of whom both Hazlitt and Proust would have approved.

I turned, therefore, with particular interest to an account of his memoirs, "Mon Match Avec La Vie," which has just appeared in Paris. The romance of Carpentier's career will no doubt be a little tarnished by his confession that his two fights with Battling Siki, in 1922 and 1924, were fixed by the promoters; but those followers of the prize-ring who have a taste for rony will be amused by an article which was written shortly before these events by the man whom many English readers now consider to be the greatest living novelist: M. Francois Mauriac.

"The conqueror of Dempsey," M. Mauriac wrote, "will be the flaming torch of the modern world. . . . He has something that will win the heart of even the sourest intellectual, he approaches, even if he does not completely personify, that embodiment of honesty which was so dear to Pascal."

M. Mauriac is rarely seen at the prize-ring.

A Case for a Plaque

ARTHUR RIMBAUD is, I suppose, the most influential poet of the last hundred years; but the centenary of his birth on October 20, 1854, aroused little stir in this country. The more honour, therefore, to the enthusiasts who have just identified, at No. 8, Royal College Street, London, N.W.1, the house in which

By ATTICUS

Rimbaud lodged during the summer of 1873.

Both Rimbaud and his fellow-fugitive Verlaine were deeply stirred by the sombre grandeur of London life. The docks reminded them of Tyre and Carthage; the hotels of Babylon; and the haunting names of "Angel" and "King's Cross" were soon tolling like warning bells through their poems. To more than one student of Rimbaud, the "Ville monstrueuse, nuit sans fin" of "Les Illuminations" is clearly London; and the visitor to Royal



College Street, may well recognise in the basement room the "souterrain" of which Rimbaud speaks in one famous passage.

Little has changed, in this quarter, since 1873; and the pilgrim can count on seeing the same doorstep, the same spear-headed iron railings, and the same darkened basement that the poet knew.

The identification is due to the devoted labours of Mr. Miron Grindea, the editor of "Adam International Review," M. Henri Thomas, the French poet and novelist, and M. Hugo Van de Perre, whose photograph of the basement in question I reproduce above. The scene calls, I think, for a plaque—more especially since the house in Howland Street, where Paul Valéry unveiled a plaque of this kind in 1922, was destroyed sixteen years later, and there is no memorial in existence to Rimbaud's passage through London.

An Exemplary Veteran

IT is a far cry from Royal College Street to the silk hats and unexpected gardens of the City of London; and from the strange visions and stranger veilleries of "Les Illuminations" to the dignified probity of our great merchant banking houses. The City is, of course, naturally conservative. We all know of offices there in which blotting-paper and the typewriter are regarded as subversive novelties and letters are not stamped and addressed but "franked and directed"; but Wm. Brandt's Sons & Co., Ltd., of Fenchurch Street, are fortunate in still having with

them an honoured servant whose memories must now be the longest of anyone now employed in the City.

It was yesterday, to be precise, that Mr. Henry Walter Warman celebrated the seventieth anniversary of his arrival at Messrs. Brandt's. Mr. Warman, now in his eighty-seventh year, began as a Walks Clerk, moved later to the stationery office, and eventually took over the post which he now holds: that of Petty Cashier. He reckons that more than a million pounds, in coins and notes, have passed through his hands during his period of office. Mr. Warman has that wide range of interests which was customary when people had not come to rely upon others for their amusements; a book-collector, an ecclesiologist, a linguist (he speaks fluent French, German and Russian, and has a smattering of several other languages), and a pre-Adamite Tory, he is the most individual of men; and I feel that both he and his employers are to be congratulated upon an association which has lasted through five generations of Brandts.

Experiments Afloat

I HAVE often wondered, while circling above London Airport, what could possibly be going forward on those featureless lagoons which are so prominent a feature of London's western extremities.

"Nothing," I imagine, is the usual answer. But I hear that one at least of these reservoirs is now the scene of intensive and secret activity. The iron gates which lead to it are closed to all—save for a few officials of the National Physical Laboratory and the Yacht Research Council, of which Lord Brabazon is chairman. The steep grassy banks may be scaled only by those who have a special permit.

Science and Sail

ALL this relates, for once, to something perfectly harmless: the trials of a 5.5 metre yacht. The currentless, waveless waters are fastened, it would seem, with instruments; and as a result of lengthy and meticulous experiment it is hoped that the perfect racing hull will one day be devised—and that that "one day" will come soon enough for Britain to triumph in this department of the 1956 Olympic Games.

If these hopes should be gratified, credit will lie not only with Mr. Owen Aisher, the owner of the yacht in question, but with Mr. Harry Ferguson, the tractor-manufacturer; for Mr. Ferguson, though famous for his conquest of a very different set of conditions has given £5,000 to further the work. Boat-building is, I understand, an individualistic affair, and this is the first occasion on which full-scale scientific research has been called in to supplement the experience of helmsmen and mathematicians.

"Moby Dick"?

A SMALL boy of my acquaintance wrote home last week from private school and said: "We had a lovely film on Thursday, it was about Windbag the Sailor."